



Safety for teen workers

Operating power lawn and yard-care equipment

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Employees must be at least 16 years old to operate power lawn mowers and other powered yard-care equipment, such as leafblowers and nylon string-style weedwhackers in non-agricultural jobs. Both push and riding mowers are allowed.

No employee under age 18 can legally operate commercial-grade powered equipment. This equipment includes powered lawn-care equipment, such as trimmers with blades or shears; chainsaws; powered thatchers, aerators, rototillers and chippers; and mowers pulled with a tractor. Minors are also prohibited from performing work where the noise exposure requires hearing protection [[WAC 296-125-030\(22\)](#)]. See item 12 on page 2 of this fact sheet for details.

Operating power lawn mowers and other powered yard-care equipment can be hazardous under certain conditions. In addition to the sharp blades that can cause serious injuries, rocks and sticks can be thrown from the equipment and possibly hit an eye, or cause a cut or bruise to exposed skin.

Teen workers can operate powered lawn-care equipment safely when they are informed, use caution and receive appropriate supervision.

Keep these safety practices in mind:

1. Regard the mower as a piece of power equipment and use caution at all times while operating this equipment. Mower guards should never be removed. If the equipment is damaged or malfunctioning in any way, do not operate it and report the problem to a supervisor.
2. Give complete and undivided attention to the job. No "horseplay".
3. Keep the area of operation clear of all persons, particularly small children. Watch for rocks and other foreign objects in the path of the mower.
4. Be sure you know how to stop the mower and motor at a moment's notice.
5. Never pull the mower toward you while using a power mower, if possible.
6. Fill gasoline-powered mowers outdoors. Avoid spilling gasoline and do not fill the tank while the engine is hot or running or while you are smoking. If you spill gas while filling the mower let the fumes evaporate before starting the engine or move the mower away from the fumes before starting it.
7. Make sure the mower is out of gear before starting. Stand firmly with your feet away from the blade. Be sure the mower will not tip or roll during the starting operation. Stay clear of the front of self-propelling mowers during and after starting.
8. If it is a self-propelled mower, keep in step with the mower. Do not lag behind or let it pull you, as you will not be in full control of the mower.
9. When operating over uneven terrain and slopes, use extreme care and make sure you have a firm footing at all times.

10. Don't mow when barefoot or wearing open-toed shoes or sandals. Provide protection by using boots, safety shoes or cleated rubber-soled shoes with good traction.
11. Use of safety glasses is recommended when operating any of these machines (see link below).
12. Lawn mowers and other lawn care equipment can be loud (> 90 dBA). Hearing protection is advised when using any of this equipment. The length of time working with the equipment may need to be limited to prevent an exposure that *requires* hearing protection.

The noise level that triggers hearing protection requirements is no more than eight hours at 85 dBA, four hours at 90 dBA, two hours at 95 dBA, or one hour at 100 dBA.

A special note for employers:

The Department of Labor and Industries administers workplace safety and health rules. Make sure you and your employees who operate power lawn mowers know and follow these requirements for:

- Operating lawn mowers. On the web at:
www.LNI.wa.gov/WISHA/Rules/portablepowertools/HTML/296-807-160.htm
- Appropriate hearing protection, such as earplugs. On the web at:
www.LNI.wa.gov/wisha/Rules/noise/
- Personal protective equipment, such as safety glasses. On the web at:
www.LNI.wa.gov/wisha/rules/corerules/HTML/296-800-160.htm

If you have questions or do not have access to the web, contact the L&I office nearest you. Ask to speak with a WISHA safety and health consultant.

For information related to the prohibited duties specific to agricultural employment of minors, please see [WAC 296-131-025](http://www.wa.gov/wac/296-131-025), call 360-902-5316, call your local L&I office, or e-mail teensafety@LNI.wa.gov.

Visit the L&I web site at www.LNI.wa.gov

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